

What Proof That Sheldon Was Shakespeare?

Oxford records indicate that Sheldon began his official career working with the Earl of Leicester in 1566, working to produce entertainment for the Queen's first visit to Oxford in August 1566. Then, upon the sudden death of acclaimed court dramatist Richard Edwards in October 1566, the record of the court dramatist goes blank: yet many plays continue to be produced without any named dramatist until around 1583 (John Lyly). See *Was Shakespeare a Hydden Man?*, 104-16. This theory posits that Sheldon was the early unnamed dramatist, working in shrouded secrecy because his Catholic recusancy posed a political danger to both the Queen and Leicester. He continued as chief dramatist for Leicester's Men and its various successors until his death in 1613.

The proof of this theory rests on multiple types of evidence, including:

- Very near the time of his death, the plays ended (1613/4). See *HM*, 233-42.
- After his death, the producers of the First Folio presented the Sheldon family with a Folio that appears through undisputed bibliographical evidence to be the first completed copy of the first published Folio. See *HM*, 48-51.
- Annotations on a rare Hall's Chronicle (1550) include unique script formations that closely match Sheldon's handwriting; Hall's was the major plot source for the early history plays. See *HM*, 129-42.
- In addition to Hall's, the plays had various other estoric sources for their plots: Sheldon had demonstrable unique access to these rare sources, including the writings of Catholic jurist Edmund Plowden that underlie the early history plays (1570s); a manuscript advocating silkworm cultivation (c. 1590); along with personal knowledge of Jewish merchants in Venice. On Plowden, see *HM*, 124-28, 143-57, 169-72; on Sheldon and silkworms, 73-81, 90-93; on Venice merchants, 74-76.
- Sheldon's wife was of the militant Throckmorton family, and Sheldon himself was a prosecuted recusant, wrongly accused in 1594 by informants of colluding in a plot to kill the Queen: these politically-charged connections prove an irrefutable need for continued secrecy over centuries. See *HM*, 11-13, 174-76, 210-11.

Among the many other claimants to the plays, none has any of these types of evidence as listed for Sheldon. The case for Sheldon is unique.

However, in addition to these key points of evidence, there are also very important biographical facts which closely match to the Shakespeare oeuvre:

- In general, he matches an accepted “generic” profile of “Shakespeare”: Warwickshire roots; legal knowledge, particularly in property, litigation, and local administration; continental travel, specifically to northern Italy; extensive personal hawking experience; deep interest in father-daughter relationships, with nine daughters, all married during his life. See *HM*, 10-16.
- The first performance of a Shakespeare work was an early version of *Romeo & Juliet* c. 1560: Sheldon was in London at the time, in Middle Temple; just before he entered Middle Temple in November 1556, he had returned from an extended trip to northern Italy (on behalf of his father’s silk tapestry business, particularly in Verona and Venice) in the retinue of Edward Courtenay, the Catholic White Rose heir to the English throne whose life, and tragic death in September 1556, closely mirrors that of Romeo Montague. See *HM*, 86-93; 68-72, 80-81.
- His early work with Leicester at Oxford paralleled the anonymous play *Wit & Will* (1566/7) acted at court and later printed as the first 5-act morality play, which was the predecessor play of early Shakespeare plays such as *Taming of A Shrew*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *Love’s Labor’s Lost*. See *HM*, 117-22.
- The sonnets, first circulated c. 1590, contain biographical implications that uniquely match Sheldon. In his fifties, a Catholic, married with 10 children, he was of the age and class qualified to write the first sonnets to the young Earl of Southampton, extolling marriage and procreation (and the happiness of 10 children). He was a friend of Lord Burghley, whose granddaughter Elizabeth de Vere the Earl of Southampton refused to marry. But the later sonnets include other details that match Sheldon: his “outcast” life; his experience with informants; his knowledge of minute legal procedural issues. See *HM*, 206-11.
- The source of the funding of the Globe (1598/9) is unknown, but 5 members of the acting troupe obtained an ownership share without any contribution to the construction costs. This generous financial arrangement followed in scope and purpose a similar arrangement Sheldon’s family had with tapestry weavers to finance tapestry production in Warwickshire. See *HM*, 224-27.
- At around the same time of the Globe construction, Sheldon had a massive loan from a London man Thomas Horde, equivalent to millions of pounds, for which there is no known or recorded purpose. Horde, a close friend of Sheldon’s, suddenly declared the loan forfeit, around 1599, ending with Sheldon’s bankruptcy. The circumstances surrounding this bankruptcy closely track the bitter story related in *Timon of Athens*, c. 1607, a play altered by the writer to have Timon lose his fortune by the sudden demands of former friends for immediate repayment of their loans, rather than – as in the early source play – Timon losing his fortune when his ships are lost at sea. See *HM*, 227-29.